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THE
INTRODUCTION
TO THE
CARMEN SECULARE.

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JOSEPH BARETTI

TO THE

ENGLISH READER.

IN an age disposed, like this, to musical entertainments ; and in a nation acquainted, like the English, with learned antiquity ; I see no reason why literature and pleasure should not contribute to each other, and why the Odes of Horace should not find their way from the school and college to gayer scenes.

Whenever I happened to look into those Odes, I have wondered at the inattention of our Composers, who, ever since the invention of modern Musick, have been hunting every where for harmonious verses, yet never bethought themselves of Horace's, which in point of harmony, as well as of other excellence, are, by universal confession, superiour to any thing of the kind

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produced these two thousand years. Pergolesi, Leo, Porpora, Sanmartino, and many more, owe no small part of their celebrity to their having set Latin verses to musick, such as the *Stabat Mater*, the *Dies Iræ*, the *Tantum ergo*, and the *Veni Creator*. They went further, and set to musick various pieces in Latin prose, such as the *Miserere*, the *De profundis*, the *Lamentationes Jeremiæ*, and several other, as it is well known to every lover of their art. How they could go so far, yet leave Horace totally unnoticed, nor ever try what could be done with his Lyric Poetry, cannot but create astonishment, as it is more than probable they would there have opened themselves a mine of musick, if I may so call it, productive of the greatest riches, and not soon to be exhausted. But so it will oftentimes happen, that the most obvious attainments, though ever so valuable, will be overlooked, and less desirable advantages pursued with eagerness.

That the Odes of Horace are susceptible of the finest musick, I take for granted no body will contest; and if it should be doubted or denied, I hope my friend Pholidor will soon evince, that cavil must fall before experience. It appears from many passages in those Odes, that they were intended for musick; nay, that they were sung in the very act of their existence. Horace has said it repeatedly, that he composed them at the sound of the *Barbiton* and the *Cithara*; and I have always taken his words literally, because the custom still subsists in many parts of Italy, especially in Horace's native province, of composing verses after that manner. The Apulians and Calabrians of this day compose their rude songs, sometimes

times deliberately, oftener extempore, to the sound of the Guitar and the Colascione, which, if the truth was known, would be set down in all Lexicons as perfect equivalents of the Cithara and the Barbiton, notwithstanding the present vulgarity of their names. The Spaniards likewise, who, in language as in other particulars, bear a greater resemblance to the Eastern Italians than any other people, have that same custom over the greatest part of their country; nor would it be easy to prove that they came by that custom otherwise than the Apulians and Calabrians. To derive it from the Northern Nations, which, overthrowing the Empire, severally possessed themselves of Spain and Italy, is less probable, as it is not recorded that the Northern Nations had any such custom.

I am not to be told that the English, the French, and other cultivators of Poetry all over Europe, make verses in their respective languages, without any help either from their own voice, or from any musical instrument. It does not however follow, that their practice is universal. It is one of the least controverted opinions among mankind, that Poetry, in her original, went hand in hand with Musick, and singing was inseparable from playing in the metrical compositions of the first poets. What was primitively done, we may suppose to have been done for ages and ages, in an elegant manner by the skilful, in a coarse by the untaught. In Italy and in Spain, where language is easily thrown into metre, that practice has not ceased, nor is likely to cease. That Horace followed that practice, we have his own positive word: *Verba loquor socianda chordis.* Nor was he

the only poet who *associated words with sound*, as he obliquely informs us that his female friend Tyndaris did the same, and sung upon a *stringed instrument* of Penelope and Circe.

However, I do not mean that the Odes of Horace came at once in perfection from his lips. I only mean, that his general method of composing them was to sing them at first, and at the sound of an instrument. Their ultimate polish they certainly received by a diligent correction made at his leisure when he had put them in writing. The illustrious Metastasio, who, among the modern poets, approaches Horace possibly more than any other, has often practised a like method, as I am credibly informed, and made the greatest part of his scenes while audibly singing and playing on his harpsichord. I also apprehend, that the reason why blank verse could never get firm footing in Italy, where it was first invented by a dull poet, proceeds from the impossibility of making it flow into musick, let it be ever so smooth and sounding. Even Epic Poetry, to be reckoned good by my countrymen, must have this quality of running easily into some sort of musick; nor would the *Furioso* and the *Jerusalem* be much known, if the Italians could not sing them. I must further observe, that, when an Italian says in any kind of verse, *Io canto*, he strictly means that he sings, or composes what may be sung; whereas, when a Frenchman says, *Je chante*, or an Englishman, *I sing*, they mean no more than that they are composing verse.

Let us, however, leave *sub judice* the question, whether Horace composed his Odes according to the practice of many Italians and Spaniards, or that of the English and French. Musick he certainly understood, as he exhorts the fingers of his *Carmen Seculare* to attend his marking of the measures, *Servate mei pollicis ictum*: Let these words be interpreted as implying a mere blow given with this thumb upon any thing, to mark each measure; or, as I would rather have it, let them be understood as marking each measure by forcible strokes upon the gravest chord of his instrument, which, in one of his Satires, he calls *the lower of the four*; it follows either way, that Horace was acquainted with musick; and one might almost conclude from those commanding words, that, like one of our masters in an orchestra, he presided himself to the singing of his *Carmen*. This conjecture will acquire strength, if we turn to the *Prologus*, where he tells the audience, that *he sings verses never heard before*, and sings them *to boys and girls*. It borders upon absurdity there, not to interpret him literally; and it is surprising that Father Sanadon did not even suspect his having been the Musician as well as the Poet upon that occasion, after having arranged the *Polymetrum*; which, if it does not prove, at least hints, that he appeared there in both characters.

Be that notwithstanding as it will, it is sufficient for my purpose, that one of Horace's Odes must actually have been set to musick, as it was sung on a great festival. But, if that particular Ode was set to musick and sung, why should all the rest remain deprived of that honour, when they are all susceptible of musick?

Indeed,

Indeed, the modern Composers must be charged with want of sagaciousness or curiosity for having forborn to avail themselves of subjects which would have seemed with an infinite variety of new modulations. They ought to have decorated with musick the fine sense of that Poet, as it fortunately happens to be wrapped up in the most melodious metres, and expressed in the most significant words. Be it true, that it is impossible, in our days, to ascertain how the *Carmen Seculare* was set in the days of Augustus, and that we cannot even guess to what tunes the other Odes were sung, if they were ever sung. Can we do nothing more than read and recite them, because we cannot determine these points? Are we utterly to forbear rendering them still more delightful, because we are ignorant of the notes that once enlivened them? Being ignorant of the true pronunciation of the Latin tongue, we give all over Europe such sounds to its syllables, as would, in all probability, seem rude and disgusting to an ancient Roman. Yet, under this unavoidable disadvantage, we read and recite the Odes of Horace with the greatest pleasure. Why then should we scruple to give them a modern musick as we do a modern pronunciation, and fairly try whether they may, or may not, afford us a new species of pleasure, though not set off in the modulations of the Augustan age?

To make this trial, Philidor and I have joined our abilities, such as they are, and bring the *Carmen Seculare* before a British audience. The modern nation that abounds most in scholars, has a right to see first what can be done in this particular. But let no auditor be too severe to a first essay, lest succeeding attempts be discouraged.

discouraged. The summit of perfection was never reached at once. Indulgence must keep company with justice, and temper the austerity of a first decree.

Yet, as an audience cannot consist solely of scholars, and as many of the other sex may be drawn by curiosity to be our hearers, it is necessary to tell them what the *Carmen Seculare* is, and premise a few explanations, that they also may partake in the pleasure of such an exhibition.

Carmen Seculare means a Poem, or a Song, made at the beginning of a *Seculum*; that is, of a Century, to hail it in auspiciously. It was the custom of the Romans to celebrate the foundation of their city at the beginning of every century by a great festival; in which, among a variety of games and diversions, a Song was introduced, made in honour of Apollo and Diana, the tutelar Deities of their town, to implore a continuance of their favour and protection. The Song was sung in a temple dedicated to those Deities, by seven and twenty boys, and as many girls, all born of their noblest families.

The recurrence of a new century happened to fall in the reign of Augustus, who built a temple on the Palatine-Hill for the purpose of that festival, and ordered Horace to compose the Song. The Poet acquitted himself in such a manner, that most criticks, and the learned Dacier in particular, have thought that all Antiquity cannot furnish us with a thing more happily compleat.

Ever

Ever since the revival of learning, it was constantly understood, that only one of Horace's Poems was sung at that festival, and made the whole of the *Carmen Seculare*, as, in the common Collection we have of his works, only one is so entitled, which in the following sheets is placed as *Part the Fourth*. Yet Horace's Expositors and Commentators were not a little embarrassed when they came to examine several other of his Odes, and ascertain the dates and occasions of them. It was visible that this and that Ode bore some reference to the *Carmen Seculare*; but how they came to be placed separately from it, could by no means be shewn to satisfaction. What is here termed *Prologus*, is in all editions of Horace the Beginning of an Ode, with which it seems to have but little to do. And what is here called *Part the First*, is there tagged to what I call here *Part the Second*, to which it seems to form but an awkward sequel. These apparent incongruities could not be explained away by the Expositors, and some obscurity would still remain that the light of Criticism was unable to dispel.

But in the time of Lewis the Fourteenth, a Jesuit, called Sanadon, fell upon an expedient that removed all difficulties at once. He arranged some of Horace's Pieces in such an order, that they came to form a very consistent whole; and to that whole he affixed the collective title of *Polymetrum Saturnium in Ludos Seculares*, "the Saturnian Songs sung at the Secular Games." He pretended that those pieces, thus put together, had been successively sung on that occasion, and in the temple built by Augustus, during the three days that the festival lasted;

lasted ; of which festival the reader will find a copious account in Kennet's *Antiquities of Rome*, if he chuses to know more of it than I can conveniently tell him here. Sanadon's reasons for his new arrangement are deduced at large in his edition of *Horace* ; to which I must likewise refer the reader, that I may not be too prolix.

Whether the good Father was right or wrong in his new arrangement, I have not learning sufficient to determine. Some criticks think him whimsical, though they praise his ingenuity ; and some agree to his innovation. Francis, who translated *Horace* into English verse, has received it without hesitation, only transposing one of the Odes ; which transposition I have adopted. Let reason be for Sanadon, or against him, it is my interest to acquiesce in his contrivance, not only because it makes plain to me some passages in *Horace*, but also because, adopting his arrangement, the *Carmen Seculare*, or, in other words, the *Polymetrum Saturnium*, comes to form a subject for a musical entertainment greatly superior to any thing of the kind ever published by three of his best imitators, Dryden, Pope, and Metastasio.

Having once conceived that the *Carmen Seculare* was a very fit subject for such an entertainment, I looked about for a Composer, to whom I could impart my discovery, if I may so call it, and entrust the setting of it, without any fear of having it disgraced. My reverence of *Horace* made me for a long while find it difficult to fix upon a person equal to the task. I wanted not only a great knowledge

knowledge of musick, but also a ready compliance with my own ideas. I was resolved, at all events, not to have many of those common topicks and passages which every man, used to Italian Operas, has heard over and over, and can anticipate in his own mind as soon as the first bar is out of the singer's mouth ; nor would I suffer a Chapel-master to give a singer many opportunities of splitting a vowel into a thousand particles, that he may emulate the best fiddle, or the wildest nightingale. I was also resolved, that he should avoid those full repetitions, which, under the name of *Ritornello's*, prolong an air beyond endurance, and fatigue the attention without adding to the energy of the words. In short, I wanted a man of sense, a man of taste, a man of enthusiasm, fertile in ideas and expedients, and able to temper alternately the solemnity of church-musick with the brilliancy of the theatrical.

To light upon such a man was not an easy thing, and I went long in search of him without any success. At last I happened to hear at Paris some operas set to musick by Philidor, and was equally surprised and delighted to find that he possessed many of the qualifications which I was looking for. We had been acquainted in the days of our youth ; but little did I expect, at that time, that he would ever excel in any thing but Chess. I enquired after his musical character, and found that he had carried several of the prizes offered by the Directors of the Parisian Theatres, and my good friend Doctor Burney had given him a kind word in his *Musical Travels*. But Philidor was not in Paris at that time, and I quitted

I quitted it without coming to any conclusion. Good luck brought him, a long while after, to England again; and I communicated to him my scheme, which seemed to enflame him at once with an uncommon ardour. We read the Odes together several times, and discussed every syllable in them with respect to the best way of expressing musically the meaning of Horace. I gave him besides a copy of the *Polymetrum*, with many notes of mine in the margin, to awake hints, and animate his invention.

To end my narrative, which, I hope, is not over-importunate, he has done the work to my satisfaction while he was last at Paris, where he consulted likewise the learned Monsieur Diderot, and several other able men. Whether he has done it to the mind of an English Audience, one Exhibition will show. If he succeeds, I shall claim my share of the honour of his being introduced to the acquaintance of this Nation in his musical character. If he fails, I am willing to partake in his defeat, and attribute it in a great measure to his having with too much implicitness complied with my notions, and followed my advice. Let the worst come, no harm will ensue. The performance may prove unsuccessful; but it may, in some degree, teach other Composers to do better, and give Horace a more pleasing dress.

I will only add, that, in the * Translation opposite to
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* The Translation, together with the Original, will be distributed at the place of performance, which will be at Free-Masons-Hall, the last Friday of February next.

the Text, I have done my best to convey the sense of it to those who are not acquainted with the Latin tongue. The learned will readily excuse the few Notes, all taken from Sanadon, that accompany the Version. The Ladies may want them ; and they may besides call back to the memory of the younger Scholars a few things possibly forgotten since their departure from Oxford and Cambridge. *Valete omnes, et plaudite.*

